

Was Mr Evil At Chillenden In July 1996?

Next month, the trial of a convicted murderer opens at the Central Criminal Court, London – the world famous Old Bailey. On March 30 last year, after careful consideration of a dossier compiled by Surrey Police, the Crown Prosecution Service charged Levi Bellfield with the attempted kidnap of a twelve year old girl, and the kidnap and murder of thirteen year old Amanda Jane Dowler, both eight years earlier. Bellfield was already serving a life sentence for the murders of students Marsha McDonnell and Amelie Delagrange, and the attempted murder of schoolgirl Kate Sheedy.

Following his February 2008 convictions, there was intense speculation over Bellfield's possible involvement in the murder of the Surrey schoolgirl. Amanda Dowler disappeared from Walton-on-Thames on her way home from school on March 21, 2002, resulting in a massive missing person investigation. Six months later, her decomposed body was found in woodland some twenty-five miles away.

According to Victoria McEwan of CPS South East, Bellfield's trial is due to begin on May 9 and is scheduled to last eight weeks.

While it would be prejudicial to discuss the strength of the case against Bellfield in the Dowler murder, there is good reason to believe he is responsible for another, double murder, for which another man is already serving a life sentence.

On July 9, 1996, Dr Lin Russell and her two young daughters were attacked on a country lane near Chillenden, Kent. She and her youngest daughter, six year old Megan, were murdered; their dog was killed, and Dr Russell's eldest daughter, Josie, was left for dead with severe brain damage. The only survivor of this senseless and brutal hammer attack had no meaningful memory of the incident, and was unable to identify the perpetrator(s), although she made a full recovery, and later graduated from Bangor University with a degree in Graphic Design.

The following July, Michael John Stone from Gillingham, Kent, was arrested for an unrelated offence and later charged with the attack. At his trial the following year, the case against him looked reasonably strong, especially as he was said to have confessed – ie boasted – about committing the murders to other inmates while on remand. But under cross-examination, the prosecution witnesses were nowhere near as impressive, although Stone was convicted by a majority verdict, solely on the strength of these alleged confessions. Immediately after his conviction, one of these witnesses, Barry Thompson, contacted the national press and admitted his own trial evidence had been a pack of lies.

In February 2001, the Court of Appeal quashed Stone's conviction, and ordered a retrial. This took place at Nottingham Crown Court, to reduce if not eliminate prejudicial coverage, but after Stone's first conviction, his quite appalling antecedents had been all over the British media, and a totally fair trial would probably have been impossible. That being said, what happened at the retrial beggars belief. With no forensic evidence against Stone, no eyewitness evidence, indeed no meaningful evidence at all, the Crown elected to call only one witness to implicate him directly. This was Damien Daley, a young recidivist and heroine addict who claimed Stone had shouted a confession through the prison wall while held in an adjacent cell. Unbelievably, Stone was convicted again. In 2004, he was again granted leave to appeal, but this appeal was summarily dismissed.

Undaunted, Stone and his legal team fought on, but after an extensive review of the evidence – such as it is – the Criminal Cases Review Commission declined to refer his case back to the Court of Appeal for a third time. In October 2010, Stone's solicitor Paul Bacon of Bryan & Armstrong, issued a statement to this effect, adding that they were very disappointed that fragments of a lace found at the crime scene which were to be subjected to further enhanced DNA testing had been “lost”.

At this point in time, Stone's legal team have applied for a Judicial Review of the CCRC's decision, but others believe that whatever the outcome of this appeal, Levi Bellfield is a far more likely perpetrator than Stone. Like Dr Russell and her daughter, Bellfield's victims were battered to death with a hammer, and as one commentator put it, how many psychopaths could there have been attacking women with hammers in the South East of England at this time? Unlike Michael Stone, Levi Bellfield is a physically formidable individual, a bodybuilder as well as a former night club doorman.



Levi Bellfield: a photograph released after his conviction for the murders of Marsha McDonnell and Amelie Delagrange. A powerfully built former night club doorman, he has the sort of intimidating presence that could dominate a woman, her two young daughters and the family dog. Was he responsible for this shocking double murder rather than the far from formidable Michael Stone?

Following his convictions for the murders of Marsha McDonnell and Amelie Delagrange, it didn't take one tabloid long to realise that Bellfield's Christian name is an anagram of EVIL.

The police were also clearly of that opinion, and began looking into a number of unsolved violent crimes including murders and hammer assaults. One person who has researched Bellfield in some depth is John Aidiniantz, who is the curator of the Sherlock Holmes Museum! Aidiniantz has established a Bellfield connection with the Chillenden area, and has also pointed out a striking resemblance to a man seen in the area at the time by Nicola Burchell, one of the few meaningful eyewitnesses in the case.

It remains to be seen if Kent Police – who put Michael Stone behind bars – or any other force, will dare ask the unthinkable question: Did we get it wrong? But whatever the outcome of the forthcoming Bellfield trial, it is sure to raise as many questions as answers. Since his arrest, Bellfield has been surly and uncooperative, and apart from a blanket denial has said next to nothing about any of the allegations that have now been proven against him, and has to date given no indication that he ever will.

In January 2009, a documentary about Bellfield's children *My Dad, The Serial Killer* was broadcast by Channel 4 television. Produced by Matthew Rudge, this acclaimed short is available on YouTube.

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